

Soldiers *Online*

Fueling the Force *on* *Okinawa*

Story and Photos by Heike Hasenauer

AS soldiers enter sprawling Kadena Air Base, the largest U.S. installation on Okinawa, the East China Sea glistens on one side of the island and the turquoise-blue Pacific Ocean meets the shore on the other side. And here and there, local farmers chop sugar cane as they harvest their crops.

The “Home of the U.S. Army” on Okinawa is located about 15 minutes away at Marine Corps-operated Torii Station, an installation best reached by zigzagging through Kadena. Married soldiers live on the base. Single soldiers live on Torii Station.





Collectively, there are only about 900 soldiers on Okinawa, said LTC Steven Hoffpauer, 10th Area Support Group deputy commander. They represent the smallest “footprint” of the joint U.S. forces on the island, but they also represent significant support. “If they weren’t here, the joint services’ training for real-life tactical missions would come to a halt,” Hoffpauer said.

The 63-member 505th Quartermaster Battalion — located at Chibana, an Air Force installation named for the surrounding community — is the only

Only a small portion of the 33-mile-long pipeline operated by the 505th Quartermaster Battalion runs above ground.

active-duty, terminal pipeline unit in the Army actually operating a pipeline. A similar active-duty unit is stationed at Fort Lee, Va., but it doesn’t have a pipeline, said SSG Tezslyn Johnson, the battalion’s lab NCOIC.

Some laugh at the battalion’s “Proud to Pump” motto but, as the sole provider of fuel to U.S. forces on the island the unit tested, stored and delivered some 91 million gallons to customers in fiscal year 2000, said Johnson. The battalion can collectively store up to 56 million barrels of fuel, pumping it to any of six tank farms close to the island’s piers.

SSG Mark Mason, terminal NCOIC for White Beach, site of the battalion’s only diesel fuel storage

SSG Maxie Brown opens a valve that allows a ship off shore to dispense its fuel load into a valve box, from where it travels to a booster station and into the pipeline.

tanks, from which Navy ships are supplied, monitored the roughly 100 miles of pipeline — three 33-mile, parallel lines — from the control room at Chibana.

Inside the control room, sensors monitor pressure in the pipeline and indicate maintenance requirements, while five detection systems alert soldiers to potential leaks in the system, which is 95 percent underground. Safety devices automatically shut down fuel valves if a leak is detected. “That’s important, because the pipeline runs through communities,

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Barracks at Torii Station, the Army's home on Okinawa, overlook a beautiful beach on the ocean beyond.



The bustling city just outside the main gate of Kadena Air Base is full of shops, restaurants and traffic.

in some cases under homes," Mason said.

Before fuel is dispensed from ship to pipeline, 505th soldiers board the ship to collect samples, which are taken to one of two labs and tested for bottom-waste sediment.

The tests ensure the fuel hasn't been contaminated en route to Okinawa, Johnson said. "And they provide a good representation of the fuel that will be downloaded into the pipeline." The battalion also tests the fuel AAFES sells for privately owned vehicles.

Johnson said the battalion tested

more than 3,000 samples in fiscal year 2000.

While the 505th is more a battalion headquarters operation (supported by 150 local national employees), as opposed to a command-and-control pipeline (operated by line companies that can set up a pipeline hundreds of miles long), said Johnson, its soldiers perform a critical mission.

Should a contingency occur, in Korea or elsewhere in the Pacific, it's reassuring to know the joint forces of the United States, on Okinawa, will be fueled and ready to respond, U.S. Army, Japan, officials said. □

The Army on Okinawa

AMONG U.S. units on Okinawa are the 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group. With 400 soldiers, it's the largest single Army contingent on the island. And it's the only Army combat-arms battalion in Japan, said LTC Steven Hoffpauer, deputy commander of the 10th Area Support Group. *[See the story on the SF unit in the June issue of Soldiers.]*

Other Army units and Defense Department elements on Okinawa include the 10th ASG's 835th Transportation Bn., which runs Naha Port, where all commercial and household goods enter the island; and the 58th Signal Bn., which provides strategic communications support and satellite control for the joint services; and elements of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army Veterinary Command, Criminal Investigation Command, plus military intelligence and military police personnel.

Headquarters, Department of Defense Dependent Schools, Pacific, is also located on Okinawa. — Heike Hasenauer